

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
READING EDUCATION

**The Master's Comprehensive Examination
Guidelines for Preparation**

First Edition by Alice LaRusso and Janice Wagner, 1984

Revision by Reading Faculty, 1992, 1996, 2007

The purpose of this booklet is to help you prepare to take your master's comprehensive exams in reading education.

When to begin: We suggest that you begin to prepare for "comps" as soon as possible. As a guideline, you may want to follow these steps:

- Step 1: Careful course work
- Step 2: Reading and note taking, notebook preparation
- Step 3: Notebook completion, study group sessions, and integration of information.
- Step 4: Examination

Step 1: Careful coursework.

It is important to take the topics and assignments in your courses seriously. Read thoughtfully and critically, taking notes on any related books or articles that you read. Often in your courses, your professors will cite relevant references and topics. You will want to keep a list of these for future reading. Also familiarize yourself with the reading journals.

When taking notes, summarize only the important information from the text. For most articles one paragraph should suffice; for a book, one page may be adequate.

Step 2: Reading and note-taking; notebook preparation:

- Reading and note-taking - Now you will want to read books cited on class reference lists, in journal articles, as well as those recommended by professors. It is helpful to refer to the reference lists at the ends of articles and books for further readings. You may locate many of the books from McKeldin Library, the Undergraduate Library, the Library of Congress, the International Reading Association, individual publishers, and on-line. Continue to take notes on all readings.
- Compiling a list of references – For your comps, you will need to develop a list of references. Whenever you take notes, be sure to record the complete citation for your reference list.
- Preparing a notebook – You will want to prepare a notebook to bring with you when you take the exam. The notebook will be most useful to you if you organize it carefully according to topics that you can quickly access. The following is a typical list of important topics in literacy education. You will want to adapt this list to your own needs. The order in which you place the topics and the amount you select are really matters of personal preference. The notebook may not include class handouts or photocopied articles.

Prior Knowledge
 Models of the Reading Process (e.g., bottom-up, top-down, interactive, socio-cultural)
 Engaged Reading & Motivation
 Leadership in School-wide Reading Programs
 Effective Instructional Strategies for:
 Comprehension
 Phonemic Awareness & Decoding
 Vocabulary
 Study Strategies
 Metacognition
 Relating Reading and Writing
 Emergent Literacy
 Family Literacy
 Content Area Literacy
 Curriculum Integration
 Reading Across the Content Areas
 Content Area Differences
 Challenges with Informational/Expository Text
 Materials for Instruction
 Culturally Sensitive Texts
 Informational/Expository and Narrative Texts
 Texts for Beginning Reading Instruction
 Assessment of Text Difficulty
 Internet Resources
 Software Programs
 Reading Diagnosis and Instruction
 Formal vs Informal Assessment
 The Role of Standardized Tests
 Performance Assessment
 Using Reading Diagnoses to Design Instruction
 Early Intervention
 Balanced Instruction
 Enrichment Programs
 Issues and Controversies

- Finding Study Partners - Try to find a person or persons to study with at this time. You will save valuable time if you divide up the topics, copy your notes, and share your work with one another. Discussing your notes with your study partners also will help your learning. You will want to meet regularly to exchange your information. In choosing study partners, you will want to be certain that you and your partners are compatible. Be sure to consider such factors as schedule differences, note taking styles, and the dependability of the person.

Step 3: Final Preparations:

- Apply to take the exam before the deadline. A list of deadlines and the application form can be obtained in Room 1204 of the Benjamin Building and online.
- You and your partner(s) should make a tentative schedule for the remaining time. In this schedule incorporate the following:
 - 1) deadline for notebook completion (by one week before comps)
 - 2) meeting with professors for last minute questions
 - 3) deadline for outlines
 - 4) reference list completed and photocopied (You will need two copies of your reference list: one for am and one for pm.
- Complete your notebook.
 - 1) Go through your notebook thoroughly. Make sure all notes are in their appropriate sections.
 - 2) Develop a table of contents. You may want to cross-reference your topics here.
 - 3) It is very helpful to develop an outline or summary for each individual section. We want to stress how beneficial these can be during the actual comp examination
 - 4) You may wish to use highlighters or other color-coding devices to depict key ideas and organization of information.
 - 5) The department does not allow you to include class handouts or photocopied articles in your notebook.

- Reference List

After the completion of your notebook, you will want to finalize your reference list. Make 2 copies of your completed list -- one to accompany the morning question and one for the afternoon. During the exam, as you cite a reference, check the corresponding entry on your reference list. This list is then turned in with your answer. Using this previously prepared list will save valuable time during the exam.

Step 4. The Comprehensive Exam

- The exam is six hours long, with 3 hours in the morning and 3 hours in the afternoon. You will receive the am question in the morning and the pm question in the afternoon. Both questions will come to you in a manila envelope. You may use your notebook to answer both questions.
- At the end of each 3-hour session, you will place the exam question and your reference list into the envelope and return it to the proctor. You will send your answer electronically as an attachment to the e-mail address on the exam and to yourself as a back up.
- At least two faculty members will read your papers (without knowing the writer's identity) and evaluate each question separately on a five-point scale. Your answer will be evaluated on the following:
 - 1) Was the question answered?
 - 2) Was the answer referenced?
 - 3) Was it organized?
 - 4) Was it complete?
 - 5) Was it accurate?

Each answer will receive a final rating according to the attached rubric. Both the outcomes from the five scales and a qualitative assessment of your answer will be considered in assigning this rating.

In order to pass the exam, you must receive at least a low pass from both faculty members on the am question and the pm question. As soon as your exam has been evaluated, you will be notified of the outcome. If you have failed either one or both of the questions, you may retake the exam one time.

Helpful Tips

1. Start early.
2. Constantly read and take notes.
3. Plan a schedule and stick to it.
4. Don't forget to apply for the exam by the deadline. (Get form in room 1204 or on-line).
5. Find a compatible partner (or partners).
6. Be organized - it'll help reduce anxiety.
7. Try to look at notebooks of those who have taken the exam. Also, ask for their ideas about taking the exam.
8. Most of all, be calm. Don't get overwhelmed.

Sample Comprehensive Exam Questions *(Please note. These are sample questions, not representative questions. Many important topics are not addressed in these sample questions. But any important topic could be addressed on the exam.)*

1. Cite three trends in reading that you would want to be certain to consider as you plan a reading program for your school. Briefly summarize each trend, justify its inclusion, indicate research support and discuss its impact on students. Cite supporting literature and research.
2. What comprehension strategies would you want children to develop in the elementary/secondary grades? Describe each strategy and justify its inclusion. Cite supporting literature and research.
3. Describe formal and informal assessment procedures. Discuss strengths and weaknesses of each type of assessment. Make recommendations for appropriate classroom and school wide assessment procedures. Illustrate your points with examples. Cite supporting literature and research.

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